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Relative Restrictions on Relative Clauses

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1. Restrictions on Relativization in Ergative and Accusative Languages

This paper investigates restrictions on relative clauses that have been observed in various ergative and accusative languages. In ergative languages such as Inuit, Dyirbal and some Mayan languages, only intransitive subjects (S) and objects (O) may be relativized.¹ Shown in (1) is an example of the restriction in West Greenlandic Inuit. (1a) involves relativization of S, and (1b), relativization of O. In the ungrammatical (1c), the transitive subject (A) is being relativized.²

(1) *West Greenlandic Inuit*

- a. miiqqa-t sila-mi pinnguar-tu-t illar-p-u-t (S)
child-Pl outdoors-Loc play-Rel[-tr]-Pl laugh-Ind-Intr-3pN
'the children who are playing outdoors are laughing'
- b. miiqqa-t Juuna-p paari-sa-i sinip-p-u-t (O)
child-Pl Juuna-Erg look.after-Rel[-+tr]-3s.Pl sleep-Ind-Tr-3pN
'the children that Juuna is looking after are sleeping'
- c. *angut aallat tigu-sima-sa-a (A)
man gun take-Perf-Rel[+tr]-3s.s
'the man who took the gun'

(Bittner 1994:55,58)

¹The terms "O", "S" and "A", first introduced by Dixon (1972) and now standard in the ergativity literature, refer to the direct arguments of a verb. O refers to the object, S to the intransitive subject, and A to the transitive subject. The two terms S and A are necessary to distinguish intransitive from transitive subjects.

²The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: AP=Antipassive, Dat=Dative, E(rg)=Ergative, f=feminine, Ind=Indicative, Interrog=Interrogative, Intr=Intransitive, Loc=Locative, m=masculine, Mod=Modalis, N(om)=Nominative, Nfut=Nonfuture, p(l)=plural, Part=Participle, Pass.Part=Passive Participle, Perf=Perfect, Rel=Relative marker, s=singular, tr=transitive.

The following examples illustrate the same restriction in Dyirbal. (2a) and (2b) involve relativization of S and O, respectively. An A argument can be relativized only if it becomes a derived S, as it has in (2c) with antipassivization of the verb.

(2) *Dyirbal*

- a. bay-i yara [miyanda-ŋu] ba-ŋgu-n yibi-ŋgu bura-n (S)
there.N-m man.N laugh-Rel.N there-E-f woman-E. see-Past
'the woman saw the man who was laughing' (Dixon 1991:40)
- b. ŋada nyina-nyu yugu-ŋga [yara-ŋgu nudi-ŋu-ra] (O)
I.N. sit-Nfut tree-Loc man-E. cut-Rel-Loc
'I am sitting on the tree the man felled' (Dixon 1972:102)
- c. bay-i yara [jilwal-ŋa-ŋu ba-gu-n guda-gu]yanu (S)
there.N-m man.N kick-AP-Rel.N there-Dat-f dog-Dat went
'the man who kicked the dog went' (Dixon 1991:41)

There is a relativization restriction in *accusative* languages (e.g., English, French, German, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Hebrew) that applies to participial (or reduced) relative clauses (see, for example, Keenan and Comrie 1977, Underhill 1972 and Siloni 1995). Unlike in *ergative* languages, however, in these languages only subjects (i.e., A and S) may be relativized. Shown in (3) are examples from English. (3a-b) involve relativization of S and A, respectively. In the ungrammatical (3c), O is being relativized.

- (3) a. the girl arriving today (S)
- b. the man reading the newspaper (A)
- c. *the newspaper the man reading (O)

The examples in (4) are the French equivalent of (3), and exhibit the same restriction.

- (4) a. [La fille arrivant aujourd'hui à Genève] est née à Rome (S)
the girl arriving today in Geneva was born in Rome
- b. [L'homme lisant le journal] est un espion (A)
the man reading the newspaper is a spy
- c. *[Le journal l'homme lisant] est intéressant (O)
the newspaper the man reading is interesting (Siloni 1995:463-4)

The restrictions on relativization found in *ergative* and *accusative* languages may be stated as follows:

- (5) a. Relativization is restricted to *intransitive subjects (S)* and *objects (O)* in ergative languages such as Inuit, Mayan and Dyirbal.
 b. Relativization in participial clauses is restricted to *subjects (A and S)* in accusative languages such as English, French, German, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Hebrew.

In this paper I propose that the two restrictions stated above for ergative and accusative languages are derived from a single generalization, given in (6).

- (6) Relativization in nonfinite relative clauses is restricted to the arguments in the highest functional projection of the clause.

The generalization in (6) claims that: (i) the restriction occurs in nonfinite relative clauses, and (ii) only the arguments in the highest functional projection in the structure may be relativized. In section 2 I present Siloni's (1995) analysis of the restriction in (6) for participial relative clauses in accusative languages. In section 3 I discuss this restriction in ergative languages such as Inuit and Dyirbal. By showing that relative clauses in these languages are nonfinite, and that S and O are the arguments that appear in the highest functional projection, we can apply Siloni's analysis to ergative languages as well. Section 4 discusses the relationship between the nonfiniteness of the relative clause and the relativization restriction.

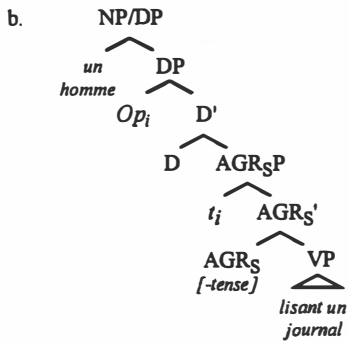
2. Siloni (1995)

In her analysis of participial relative clauses in Hebrew and French, Siloni (1995) proposes that these clauses are DPs consisting of a D⁰ head and a [-tense] sentential complement, AGRsP. She claims, moreover, that the DP involves an operator-variable chain, with the D⁰ functioning as the relative complementizer. It is the absence of tense in AGRsP that determines the projection of DP rather than the CP found in regular tensed relative clauses.

An example of a French participial relative is given in (7a), with its structure shown in (7b):³

- (7) a. Un homme [_{DP} *Op_i* [_D] [_{AGRsP} *t_i lisant un journal*]]
 a man reading a newspaper

³Siloni does not specify the topmost constituent, but I assume that it is an NP or DP.



Siloni provides evidence from extraction that the empty element in Spec AGR_S P is a variable bound by a null operator rather than PRO. It is well known that extraction out of a tensed relative clause results in a subadjacency violation, as shown in (8):

- (8) *[A qui]_j Jean est-il le seul [CP Op_i qui [t_i parle régulièrement t_j]]?
 to whom Jean is-he the only (one) that talks regularly

Siloni demonstrates that extraction from a reduced relative results in a similar violation:

- (9) *[A qui]_j Jean est-il le seul [CP Op_i [t_i parlant régulièrement t_j]]?
 to whom Jean is-he the only (one) talking regularly

In contrast, extracting from an infinitival clause is grammatical:

- (10) [A qui]_j Jean est-il le seul [CP [PRO parler régulièrement t_j]]?
 to whom Jean is-he the only (one) to talk regularly

Siloni concludes that reduced relatives involve a CP-like functional category, DP, that contains the null operator and forms an island for extraction.

Another fact in support of the variable analysis involves the participial (or absolute) construction in Italian. Siloni suggests that variables are not licensed in the subject position of this construction, thus preventing it from functioning as a reduced relative (see (11a)). With a PRO subject, as in (11b) (see Belletti 1990), the structure is grammatical.

- (11) a. *L'uomo [conosciuta Maria] è intelligente
 the man known Maria is intelligent
 b. [PRO Conosciuta me], hai cominciato ad apprezzare il mare
 known me (you) started liking the sea

Siloni proposes an account of the relativization restriction, i.e., that only subjects can be relativized, in terms of Case. The AGRs head, being [-tense], cannot assign nominative Case to the NP in its Spec. Siloni claims that the [-tense] AGRs assigns null Case, following Chomsky and Lasnik's (1991) proposal for the PRO subject in infinitival clauses. Based on her evidence that the subject of participial relatives is a variable rather than PRO, Siloni suggests that this null Case can also be assigned to variables, as long as their ϕ -features can be checked in a Spec-head configuration. Crucially, in participial relatives Spec AGRsP must contain the variable, as a lexical NP would not receive the proper Case. Relativization is thus restricted to the arguments in Spec AGRsP which, in accusative languages, is the position of subjects (i.e., A and S). This accounts for the generalization in (6) (repeated below) for accusative languages, where Spec AGRsP is the highest functional projection.

- (6) Relativization in nonfinite relative clauses is restricted to the arguments in the highest functional projection of the clause.

3. The Relativization Restriction in Ergative Languages

In this section I propose a unified account of the relativization restriction in ergative languages. My discussion focuses on three ergative languages which exhibit the S/O restriction: Inuit, Mayan and Dyirbal. In section 3.1 I discuss previous accounts of the relativization restriction. In section 3.2 I show that this restriction results from (6) above, the generalization that was shown to account for the relativization restriction in accusative languages.

3.1 Ergativity and the Relativization Restriction

Let us first characterize the defining properties of an ergative language. Ergative and accusative languages differ in the way that they group together the A, S and O arguments. In an accusative language, A and S are grouped together, excluding O, while in an ergative language S and O are grouped together, excluding A:

- (12) accusative $\left. \begin{array}{l} A \\ S \\ O \end{array} \right\}$ ergative

This grouping of arguments is most typically manifested in the Case system. Shown in (13) is an example of the ergative Case marking pattern found in Dyirbal. In (13a) the A argument, *yabu* 'mother' appears with ergative Case, while the O has nominative Case.⁴ In (13b), the S argument *ɲuma* 'father' appears with nominative Case, the same Case as the O in (13a).

(13) *Dyirbal* (Ergative)

- a. ɲuma-ø yabu-ŋgu bura-n
 father-Nom mother-Erg see-Nonpast
 'Mother saw father'
- b. ɲuma-ø banaga-n'yu
 father-Nom return-Nonpast
 'Father returned'

(Dixon 1979:61)

Ergative languages like Dyirbal, Inuit and Mayan exhibit an ergative pattern in relative clauses as well as in the Case-marking system. Relativization in these languages is restricted to S and O, in contrast to the S/A restriction in accusative languages. Most of the discussions of relativization in Dyirbal and Mayan simply describe the facts without providing a theoretical basis (see, for example, Dixon 1972, 1979, 1994 for Dyirbal, and Craig 1977, Dayley 1977, Larsen and Norman 1979 and Larsen 1987 for various Mayan languages). Dixon (1972, 1994) uses the notion of an "S/O pivot" for Dyirbal, where S and O are grouped together for certain syntactic processes. However, it is not explained how syntactic structure corresponds to the S/O pivot. Similarly, the literature on the Mayan languages (e.g. Larsen and Norman 1979 and Larsen 1987) describe the restriction in relative clauses and related constructions (such as focus and *wh*-questions), without situating the facts within a theoretical framework.

The Inuit literature, on the other hand, contains many theoretical analyses of the relativization facts (see Creider 1978, Smith 1984, Woodbury 1985, Johns 1988, 1992, Bok-Bennema 1991, Bittner 1994 and Bittner and Hale 1996, among others). Smith (1984), for example, considers relativization to involve the incorporation of a verb with a nominalizing affix. He proposes a constraint on clausal union that restricts incorporation to intransitive constructions. The example in (14), repeated from (1c) above, is ungrammatical because the relative clause is transitive.⁵

⁴This case is also referred to as absolutive Case.

⁵Smith (1984) discusses relative clauses in a particular Inuit dialect, Labrador Inuttut. In order to keep the data as simple as possible, I demonstrate his analysis using the West Greenlandic data introduced earlier in this paper.

- (14) *angut aallat tigu-sima-sa-a
 man gun take-Perf-Rel[+tr]-3s.s
 'the man who took the gun'

The relative clause in (15) (repeated from (1b)), however, is considered to be an intransitive clause, with the ergative-marked *Juuna* a possessor that has raised out of the clause.

- (15) miikka-t Juuna-p paari-sa-i sinip-p-u-t
 child-Pl Juuna-Erg look.after-Rel[-+tr]-3s.Pl sleep-Ind-Tr-3pN
 'the children that Juuna is looking after are sleeping'

For Johns (1988, 1992), transitive relative clauses in Inuit consist of a possessive phrase in apposition with the head noun. The verb stem in the possessive phrase appears with a passive nominalizer, resulting in a nominal with the meaning 'the one that was Ved'. In (16), for example, the passive nominalizer *-ga* gives *arnaup kunigaa* the literal interpretation 'the woman's kissed one'.

- (16) angut [arna-up kuni-ga-a]
 man woman-Erg kiss-Pass.Part-3s
 'the man who the woman kissed' (Johns 1992:71)

The relativized element cannot be the subject, as that would be incompatible with a passive interpretation.

Bittner and Hale (1996) analyze Inuit relative clauses as internally-headed relative clauses that are the nominal equivalent of verbal clauses. As in verbal clauses, the S and O arguments in the relative clause must raise to a higher functional projection for Case reasons. The A argument, however, remains in the VP, as its Case requirements are satisfied *in situ*.⁶

With the exception of Bittner and Hale (1996), the analyses of Inuit relative clauses tend to consider these structures to be unique Inuit constructions.⁷ In the following section I propose that they (and the other ergative relative clauses) have the

⁶Although this is not discussed in Bittner and Hale (1996), it appears that NP raising is also necessary to fulfill the semantic requirements (e.g., predication) of internally-headed relative clauses. Otherwise, there is no reason why the *in situ* A argument cannot be interpreted as the internal head of the relative clause.

⁷Bittner and Hale, in proposing that Inuit relative constructions are internally-headed relative clauses, take a more universal approach to these structures.

same structure as the participial relatives in accusative languages, thus manifesting the same relativization restriction.

3.2 Syntactic Ergativity and the Relativization Restriction

Recent analyses of ergative languages have proposed that in languages such as Inuit, Dyirbal, Mayan and Abaza, the S and O arguments appear in the highest position in the syntactic structure (see, for example, Campana 1992, Murasugi 1992, 1997, O'Herin 1995, Bittner 1994, Bittner and Hale 1996, and Manga 1996). Such languages, in which O raises to a position above A, are referred to as syntactically ergative languages. Although the above studies propose different syntactic structures and motivations for movement, the position to which S and O are presumed to raise may be regarded as the equivalent of Siloni's (1995) Spec AGRsP. The evidence supporting the appearance of S and O in this position includes facts from scope, verbal agreement and specificity. I will limit the following discussion to the scope facts.

Bittner (1994) and Bittner and Hale (1996) claim that the narrowest scope option an operator can take is its c-command domain at s-structure. In Inuit, since A appears in a position lower than the operator, it has the option of taking narrow scope relative to VP-level operators, as shown in (17a). A wide scope reading is also available because of the possibility of Quantifier Raising at LF (see (17b)).

- (17) ullumi atuartu-p ataatsi-p Juuna uqaluqatigi-nngi-la-a
 today student-Erg one-Erg Juuna talk.to-not-Ind-3s.3s
 a. 'No student talked to Juuna today'
 b. 'One student did not talk to Juuna today' (Bittner and Hale 1996:567)

In contrast, an S or O argument can only have wide scope, as it appears above the sentential operator at s-structure, in Spec IP (i.e., Spec AGRsP). In (18), only the wide scope reading is available for the object *atuartuq ataasiq* 'one student'.

- (18) ullumi Juuna-p atuartuq ataasiq uqaluqatigi-nngi-la-a
 today Juuna-Erg student one talk.to-not-Ind-3s.3s
 'there is one student that Juuna did not talk to today' (Bittner and Hale 1996:568)

Assuming, then, that in syntactically ergative languages S and O raise to Spec AGRsP, the generalization in (6) above restricting relativization to the arguments in the highest functional projection appears to apply to these languages as well. The explanation for the restriction, however, as proposed by Siloni (1995), is based on the fact that only

variables can appear in Spec AGRsP. For (6) to be valid, it must be shown that the relative clause in ergative languages is nonfinite, and involves an operator-variable chain.

Although Inuit, Dyirbal and Mayan relative clauses are not usually referred to in the literature as participial relative clauses, the consensus is that they involve a nominal construction. Relative clauses in Inuit have been described as containing, for example, a nominalized verb (Smith 1984), adjectival noun (Woodbury 1985), derived nominal (Johns 1992) or nominal relative (Bittner 1994). One distinct nominal property of both Inuit and Dyirbal relative clauses is the presence of Case. The verbal element in these relative clauses is marked with the same Case as that of the relative head. In example (19) from Inuit, the verbal element *pisuktu(q)* 'walk-Part' appears with modalis Case, the same Case assigned to the relative head *arna(q)* 'woman'. Similarly, in the Dyirbal example in (2b) above, both the relative head *yugu* 'tree' and the verbal element *mudi-ŋu* 'cut-Rel' appear with locative Case.

- (19) angut iksiva-juq [arna-mik pisuk-tu-mik] taku-vuq
 man sit-Ind.3sN woman-Mod walk-Part-Mod see-Ind.3sN
 'the man who was sitting saw the woman who was walking' (Creider 1978:98)

The ungrammaticality of the following example suggests that the operator-variable analysis can be applied to ergative relative clauses as well. Extraction from the relative clause in Inuit appears to result in a subadjacency violation.⁸

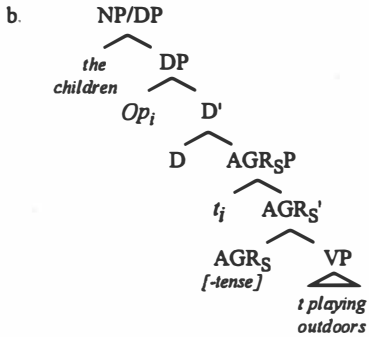
- (20) *Jaani-up quki-lauq-taŋa nanuq [kia taku-lauq-pauk]
 John-Erg shoot-Past-3s polar bear [who.Erg see-Past-Interrog.3s.3s]
 'who did John shoot the polar bear that t saw'

The structure of intransitive and transitive relative clauses are as shown in (21) and (22), respectively.

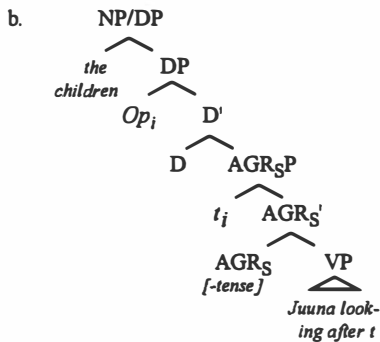
⁸This example is somewhat awkward since *wh*-questions in Inuit require an interrogative mood morpheme on the verb, replacing the participial morpheme that would normally appear in relative clauses. It is therefore not clear whether example (20) is a participial (nominal) or indicative (verbal) clause. It may turn out that this example is ungrammatical because of the use of a verbal rather than participial relative clause, and not because it involves extracting out of a DP island.

If it is the case that relative clauses in Inuit do not involve operator movement but simply NP movement (as claimed by Bittner 1994 and Bittner and Hale 1996, for example), then the parallel between ergative and accusative relative clauses would not hold as proposed in this paper. However, one would predict that whatever accounted for the relativization restriction in NP-movement relative clauses in ergative languages would still hold for the same type of relative clause in accusative languages (with the differences arising from the function of the arguments undergoing the restriction).

(21) a. the children playing outdoors



(22) a. the children Juuna looking after



4. Nonfiniteness and the Relativization Restriction

Crucial to the present analysis is the relationship between the nonfiniteness of relative clauses and the existence of the relativization restriction. As shown in (23), if the verbal element is a participle, then there is a restriction on the relativizable arguments.

(23) Participle → Restriction

Let us now consider whether the condition holds in the opposite direction. That is, if a language exhibits the restriction, then is the verbal element in the relative clause necessarily a participle (see (24a))? Or, equivalently, if the verbal element is not a participle, is it the case that there is then no restriction (see (24b))?

- (24) a. Restriction \rightarrow Participle
b. \neg Participle $\rightarrow \neg$ Restriction

Shown in (25) are the tensed equivalent of the English participial relatives in (3) above.

- (25) a. the girl who arrived/is arriving/will arrive today (S)
b. the man who read/is reading/will read the newspaper (A)
c. the newspaper the man read/is reading/will read (O)

The grammaticality of (25a-c) demonstrates that there is no restriction in tensed relative clauses. In other words, (24a-b) hold true in English, as well as in Hebrew, French and German (Siloni 1995, Keenan and Comrie 1977).

It has been observed that in Malagasy, an accusative language, relative clauses exhibit an S/A restriction although they contain a tensed rather than participial verb (Keenan 1976, Keenan and Comrie 1977). As shown in (26a-b), A may be relativized, but not O. Relativization is permitted, however, if the O becomes a derived S by passivization (see (26c)).

- (26) a. ne vehivavy [izay nividy ny vary ho an'ny ankizy] (A)
the woman that bought the rice for the children
'the woman who bought the rice for the children'
- b. *ny vary [izay nividy ho an'ny ankizy ny vehivavy] (O)
the rice that bought for the children the woman
'the rice that the woman bought for the children'
- c. ny vary [izay novidin' ny vehivavy ho an'ny ankizy] (S)
the rice that buy-Pass the woman for the children
'the rice that was bought by the woman for the children'
- (Keenan 1976:266)

Subjects in Austronesian languages such as Malagasy, Toba Batak and Tagalog exhibit unusual properties, suggesting that the subject in such languages is actually a topic (see, for example, Schachter 1976). These languages have a rich voice system that

promotes any NP to subject, or topic, position. Manaster-Ramer (1979) observes that Malagasy and Tagalog both have relative clauses which lack corresponding main clauses in which the relativized NP would appear as the subject. For example, the equivalent of (26b), *the woman bought rice for the children*, would not exist in Malagasy. Manaster-Ramer speculates whether only subjects may be relativized, or whether the relativized element becomes a so-called subject or topic. This requires further investigation, as it appears that only topic languages are counter-examples to the generalizations in (24) above.

In this final section, I would like to discuss Keenan and Comrie's (1977) Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy, which is claimed to reflect the accessibility of noun phrases to relativization:

(27) SU > DO > IO > OBL > GEN > OCOMP

Only the first two elements, SU (Subject) and DO (Direct Object), are relevant to the present discussion. According to the Hierarchy, subjects (i.e., A and S) are more accessible to relativization than direct objects (i.e., O). Keenan and Comrie claim this to be a universal hierarchy reflecting the "psychological ease of comprehension" (p. 88).

As discussed above, however, in ergative languages it is S and O that are the most accessible to relativization. To accommodate such languages, Keenan and Comrie redefine the notion of "subject" in ergative languages to include S and O rather than S and A. With the syntactic analysis proposed in this paper, we can preserve the universal semantic notion of "subject" (i.e., the initiating or controlling agent: S and A). The differences in the relativization restriction in ergative and accusative languages result from the relative positions of arguments after, and not before, movement.

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